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Mesa Verde National Park Planning Guide

PUBLICATION

Mesa Verde National Park was established in 1906 to preserve the archeological sites which prehistoric Indians built on the mesa tops and in the alcoves of a score of rugged canyons. The park, containing 52,073 acres of Federal land, is a unit of the National Park System and is administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

Mesa Verde, Spanish for 'green table', rises high above the surrounding country. For about 1,000 years agricultural Indians occupied the mesa and surrounding regions. From the hundreds of dwellings that remain archeologists have compiled one of the most significant chapters in the story of prehistoric America. If you are able to leave your modern self behind, and live and think only in the past, you may be able to understand and enjoy a fascinating story of life in earlier times.

Today there are over four thousand known archeological sites in Mesa Verde National Park, approximately 600 of these are cliff dwellings. Only a few have been excavated. Unoccupied for many centuries, they have been weakened by natural forces. Some were badly damaged by looters before the area was made a National Park. Maximum protection must be given to the dwellings in order to preserve them.

One regulation is strictly enforced: Visitors may enter cliff dwellings only when accompanied by a Park Ranger. Visitors who have received instruction at the museum and maps may visit some of the mesa top sites unaccompanied.

The Mesa Verde area was inhabited for about 1,300 years by agricultural people who began to drift into the area shortly after the beginning of the Christian Era. At first their culture was simple, but there was a constant progress and by 1200 A.D. they had reached a high cultural level.

Archeological sites of many different types are accessible to visitors. They range from pithouses built during the 500's to the cliff dwellings of the 1200's. The cliff dwellings are the most spectacular, but the mesa top pithouses and pueblos are equally important. Seen in their chronological order, these sites show the architectural development of Mesa Verde.

The first farming people in the Mesa Verde area were called Basketmakers (1-400 A.D.), because weaving excellent baskets was their outstanding craft. At this early dat, the people did not know three important things: how to make pottery , build houses and use the bow and arrow. No sites dating from the early Basketmakers have been excavated at Mesa Verde.

Around the year 400 A.D. the people learned to make pottery and build roofed dwellings. Around the year 750 A.D. they began to use the bow and arrow. Although the people were still the same, the culture was changing. Archeologists call the people at this time the Modified Basketmakers (400-750 A. D.). The pithouses were built in alcoves and on the mesa tops. Scores of pithouse villages have been found on the mesas, and two Modified Basketmaker pithouses are on exhibit at Mesa Verde.

Starting about the year 750 A.D., the people grouped their houses together to form compact villages. These have been given the name of 'pueblo', a Spanish term meaning village. The name, Developmental Pueblo (750-100 A.D.), simply indicated that during this period there was a great deal of experimentation and development. Many types of house walls were used; adobe and poles, stone slabs topped with adobe, adobe and stones, and finally true course masonry. The houses were joined together to form compact clusters around open courts and in these courts were pithouses which grew deeper and finally developed into ceremonial rooms now called kivas.

During the last century most Pueblo Indians of Mesa Verde left the mesa tops and built their homes in the alcoves that abound in the many canyons. This last period marks the climax of the Pueblo culture in Mesa Verde, and is known as the Great Classic Pueblo Period (1100-1300 A.D.). The exact number of dwellings in Mesa Verde National Park is unknown, but over 600 cliff dwellings have been documented.

Beginning in 1276 A. D. drought struck the region. For 24 years precipitation was deficient. One by one the springs dried up and the people were in serious trouble. Their only escape was to seek regions which had a more dependable water supply. Village after village were abandoned and before the drought ended, all of the people had left the Mesa Verde area. When the people left they migrated southward to the Rio Grand river in New Mexico, and west to the Hopi country in Arizona. Undoubtedly among the ancestors of many Pueblo Indians of today are the former inhabitants of Mesa Verde.

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Mesa Verde National Park
Planning Guide

To get the most out of your visit to Mesa Verde, stop first at the Far View Visitor Center (open summers only, 8am to 5pm) located 15 miles (25km) from the park entrance; or the Chapin Mesa Museum (open year round) located 21 miles from the park entrance.

The park entrance is mid-way between Cortez and Mancos, Colorado on US Highway 160. It is 21 miles (34km) from the park entrance to the museum and Chapin Mesa sites. Depending on traffic and weather conditions, allow at least 45 minutes driving time. This narrow mountainous road has sharp curves and steep grades. The elevation of the park ranges from 6,900 feet to 8,600 feet above sea level.

BACKPACKING AND HIKING: There is no backpacking or cross-country hiking in the park. Hiking is allowed only in developed areas on the park's six trails. Hikers must register at the Chief Ranger's Office for the Petroglyph Point and Spruce Canyon trails. All trails are closed during the winter, there is NO overnight back country use.

CAMPING: Morefield Campground is open from approximately May to mid-October, accommodating tents, trailers and motor homes. It is located four miles south of the park entrance. There are no reservations accepted, camping is first-come, first-served, but rarely fills up. Each campsite has a picnic table and fireplace with grill. The campground has modern comfort stations and trailer dump stations. The concessioner gas station, camp store, snack bar, laundry and showers are available approximately mid-May through early October. Firewood gathering is not permitted. Charcoal and firewood are available at the store. Camping is limited to 14 days. The fee is $9.00 per site without hookups, $16.00 per site with hookups.

GROUP CAMPING: 17 group sites are available in Morefield Campground. Reservations can be made through ARAMARK Mesa Verde, PO Box 277, Mancos, CO 81328, (970)533-7731. Fees are $4.00 per person, with a $40.00 minimum. Each group site accommodates 25 people.

ENTRANCE FEES: $5.00 per private vehicle, $3.00 per person (walking, bicycle, etc.). The entrance permit is valid for seven consecutive days from date of purchase. Annual Mesa Verde National Park permits are $15.00 for unlimited entry for one year from date of purchase. Golden Eagle Passports are $25.00, for unlimited entry one year from the date of purchase. Golden Age and Access Passports are accepted. Commercial vehicle fees are: 1-6 people, $30.00; 7-25 people, $45.00; 26 people and over, $100.00. This rate is based on the total capacity of the vehicle, even if seats are empty.

LODGING: Motel accommodations are available at the Far View Lodge from early May to mid-October. For rates and reservations contact ARAMARK Mesa Verde, PO Box 277, Mancos, CO 81328, 1-800-449-2288.

PETS: Pets must be on a leash at all times, are not allowed on trails, in ruins, or in buildings. There are no kennels available in the park.

PICNIC FACILITIES: Picnic areas are found in the museum area on Chapin Mesa, both loops of the Ruins Road, Morefield Campground, and Wetherill Mesa.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS: Cliff dwellings may be entered only when accompanied by a ranger. Trailers and towed vehicles are not permitted beyond Morefield Campground. Bicycles are not permitted on the Wetherill Mesa Road. Organized bicycle groups are not permitted due to extremely narrow roads.

TOURS: National Park Service - for specific questions on tours, contact the museum at (970)529-4475.

Spruce Tree House: Self-guided tours in the summer, ranger led tours in the winter (weather and trail conditions permitting). This is the only tour available in the winter.

Cliff Palace: Ranger led tours in the summer. Visitors must obtain a ticket for the tours at the Far View Visitor Center the day of their visit. There are no advance reservations.

Balcony House: Ranger led tours offered late May through late September. Visitors must obtain a ticket for the tours at the Far View Visitor Center the day of their visit.. There are no advance reservations. This tour requires climbing a 30 foot ladder and crawling through a tunnel.

Ruins Road: Two six mile self guiding loops, open from 8am to sunset. Many cliff dwellings can be viewed from canyon rim viewpoints. On the Mesa Top Loop there are exhibits of five archeological sites. Road open year round depending on weather.

Far View Ruin: Self guided tour of mesa top pueblos. Open 8am to sunset, mid-April to mid-November, weather permitting.

Wetherill Mesa: Private vehicles are allowed on the twelve mile stretch from the Far View Visitor Center to the parking area on Wetherill Mesa. From there take the tram for a ranger led tour of Long House and the self guided tour of the Badger House Community of mesa-top villages. Visitors must obtain a ticket for the Long House tour at the Far View Visitor Center the day of their visit. There are no advance reservations. This area is open only in the summer, approximately Memorial weekend through Labor Day. Sharp curves and steep grades limit types of vehicles allowed on the road. The length limit is 25 feet, gross vehicle weight limit is 8,000 pounds. Bicycles are not allowed on this road due to safety concerns.

Information via the Internet

World Wide Web :
Http://nps.gov
Http://www.mesaverde.org

E-mail:
MEVE_General_Information@nps.gov

Hiking in Mesa Verde National Park is Restricted

Regulations governing the use of Mesa Verde National Park permit hiking only around developed areas on the trails listed below. Visitors found hiking away from developed areas or designated trails, or entering cliff dwellings when not accompanied by a uniformed National Park Service employee, are subject to penalties provided for in Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (maximum fine of $500 and 6 months imprisonment). These regulations are necessary to protect the fragile and irreplaceable archeological sites and artifacts, for which Mesa Verde National Park was established.

Hikers are advised to carry water with them on all trails during the summer months. Please stay away from cliff edges as undercut overhangs are dangerous. Trails can be muddy and slippery after summer rains. Proper footwear (hiking boots or sturdy tennis shoes) is recommended. Visitors with cardiac or respiratory conditions should be warned that all trails, except the Soda Canyon Trail, are strenuous, generally with steep elevation changes. Contact a Park Ranger if you have any questions.

Bicycle Use

Bicycle riders must comply with all traffic regulations.

Bicycles may be ridden only on established public roads and parking areas.

Each bicycle must exhibit a white light on the front visible for 500' and a red light or red reflector on the rear visible for 50' or 300' during periods of low visibility and in the tunnel.

Bicycles must be ridden as far to the right side of the roadway as possible in single file.

At no time may a bicycle rider be attached to or towed by a motor vehicle.

No bicycle shall be used to carry more persons at one time than the number for which it is designed and equipped.

Bicycles are not allowed on the Wetherill Mesa road or on any trails.

Due to the steep nature of the road, lack of shoulders and poor condition of the pavement, organized bicycle groups are prohibited.

TRAILS ON CHAPIN MESA: Hikers are required to register in advance at the Chief Park Ranger's Office for the Petroglyph Point and Spruce Canyon trails.

Petroglyph Point Trail: 2.8 miles, begins from the Spruce Tree House trail. The trail follows below the edge of the plateau to the south, then makes a short climb to the rim of the mesa and returns via the rim. You will have good views of Spruce Tree and Navajo Canyons. This is the only trail in the park open to visitors where you may view petroglyphs. The trail ends near the museum.

Spruce Canyon Trail: 2.1 miles, begins from the Spruce Tree House trail. The trail follows the bottom of Spruce Canyon, climbs up about 500 feet to the picnic area, and terminates at the museum. This trail offers an opportunity to experience the canyon bottom.

Soda Canyon Overlook Trail: 1.5 miles, begins at a parking area on the Cliff Palace Loop Road, past the Balcony House parking area. This trail is an easy walk to the canyon edge, and offers views of Balcony House and other archeological sites along Soda Canyon. No permit required.

TRAILS IN MOREFIELD CAMPGROUND: (No permit required.)

Prater Ridge Trail: 7.8 miles, begins and terminates on the west end of the Morefield Campground. This trail ascends the east side of Prater Ridge and follows a loop around the top of the ridge, returning via the same route. A cut-off trail may be taken which shortens the trail to 3 miles. Changes in elevation and vegetation types, along with views of the surrounding country can be seen.

Knife Edge Trail: 1.5 miles, trail follows the old road alignment from the northwest corner of Morefield Campground toward the Montezuma Valley Overlook. This trail provides good views of the Montezuma Valley, and is an excellent place to watch sunsets.

Point Lookout Trail: 2.3 miles, trail switchbacks up the back side of Point Lookout and follows the top of the mesa. The trail provides excellent views of both Montezuma and Mancos valleys, as well as the surrounding countryside.

Need more information? Call (970)529-4475 or (970)529-4461

Accessibility

Visitors to Mesa Verde experience rugged terrain at an elevation of 7,000 to above 8,000 feet. Steep cliffs, deep canyons and narrow trails can be a danger to all visitors. Persons with heart or respiratory ailments may have breathing problems at this high altitude. Wheelchairs with wide rim wheels are recommended on trails. Visually impaired visitors will need an assistant to read exhibit labels since none of the exhibit displays have been transcribed into braille.

Hearing impaired visitors may call (970) 529-4475 to be connected to the park's TDD. For further information about the accessibility of certain facilities, please contact a park ranger.

Scenic Overlooks:
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible with assistance but may not meet legal grade requirements.

Morefield Campground & Picnic Areas:
Designated parking, restrooms, campsites, telephone, paved walks and gravel trails.
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible with assistance.

Far View Visitor Center:
A wheelchair for loan may be acquired here.
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible without difficulty. Paved ramps.

Far View Complex:
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible with assistance.

Museum & Park Headquarters:
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible with assistance. One to three steps in museum area; portable ramp available. Rangers and staff will assist.

Mesa Top Loop Road:
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible without difficulty. Paved trails.

Spruce Tree House:
Designated parking, restrooms, drinking fountains.
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible with assistance, but does not meet legal grade requirements.

Cliff Palace & Balcony House:
Visually Impaired: Accessible - not recommended.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Not accessible.

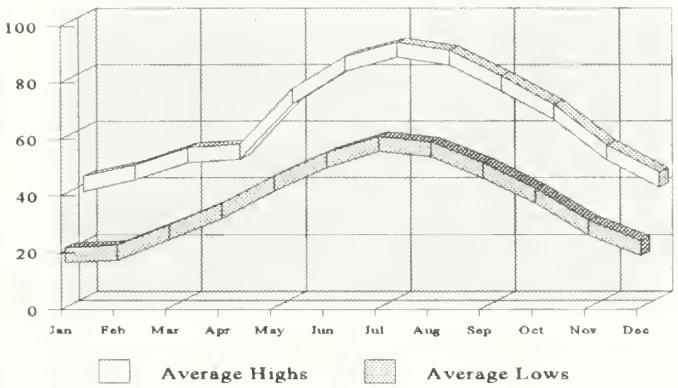
Step House & Badger House:
Visually Impaired: Accessible with assistance.
Hearing Impaired: Accessible without difficulty.
Ambulatory Limitations: Accessible with assistance, but does not meet legal grade requirements.

Areas of Interest Near Mesa Verde National Park			
Anasazi Heritage Center	(970)882-4811	Curecanti National Recreation Area	(970)641-2337
Arches National Park	(801)259-8161	Dinosaur National Monument	(970)374-3000
Aztec Ruins National Monument	(505)334-6174	Durango Chamber of Commerce	(970)247-0312
Bent's Old Fort Natl. Historic Site	(719)348-2596	Durango & Silverton Rail Road	(970)247-2733
Black Canyon of the Gunnison N. M.	(970)249-7036	Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument	(719)748-3253
Bryce Canyon National Park	(801)834-5322	Grand Canyon National Park	(602)638-7888
Canyon deChelly N. M.	(520)674-5436	Great Sand Dunes National Monument	(719)378-2312
Canyonlands National Park	(801)259-7164	Hovenweep National Monument	(970)529-4461
Chaco Culture N.H.S.	(505)786-7014	Mesa Verde Museum Association	(970)529-4445
Colorado National Monument	(970)858-0372	Rocky Mountain National Park	(970)586-1206
Colorado Welcome Center, Cortez CO	(970)565-4048	Zion National Park	(801)772-3250

Weather Statistics

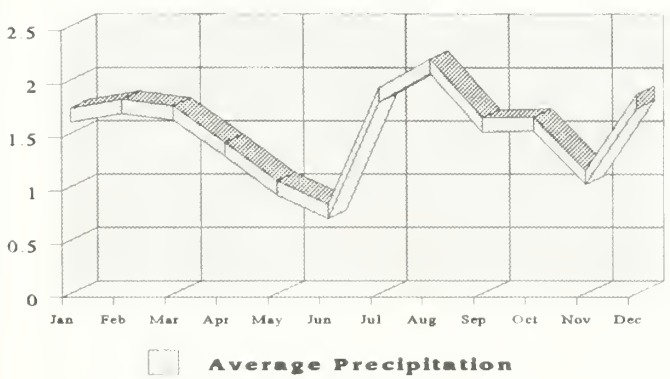
Mesa Verde National Park generally has mild weather during the summer months, and during some winters. Snow storms may occur as late as May, and as early as October, but usually both of these months are pleasant. Summer days (June through September) are generally warm to hot, with cool evenings. Afternoon thunder showers are common during July and August.

Average Temperatures

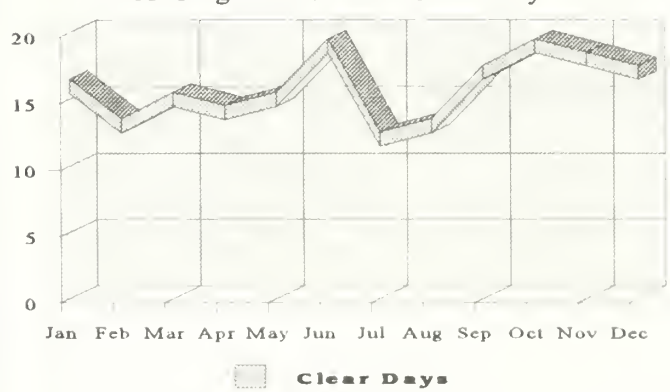


Average Precipitation

Measured In Inches



Average Number of Clear Days



Concessioner Services

Lodging within Mesa Verde

The Far View Lodge (open May-October) is located 15 miles from the park entrance. The concessionaire, ARAMARK, operates this facility. For information on pricing and reservations, please call 1-800-449-2288.

Camping within Mesa Verde

The Morefield Campground (open summers only) is located four miles from the park entrance. The concessionaire, ARAMARK, maintains the nearly five hundred site campground. This campground rarely fills, therefore, no reservations are needed or accepted. Large groups (thirty or more) can make reservations for group camping through the concessionaire at (970)533-7731.

Gasoline within Mesa Verde

Gasoline is available at the Morefield service station located near the Morefield Campground, and at the Far View Service Station located 15 miles inside the park adjacent to the Visitor Center. Both stations are maintained by the concessioner, ARAMARK, and only open in the summer.

Food Service and Gifts within Mesa Verde

The Spruce Tree Terrace, located near the museum, is open year round offering a gift shop and food service. The Far View Terrace, located 15 miles from the park entrance, is open summers only and offers a gift shop and food service. The Far View Lodge also located 15 miles from the park entrance offers fine dining. At Morefield Campground a gift shop and food service are available. These concessions are operated by ARAMARK.

Showers and Laundry within Mesa Verde

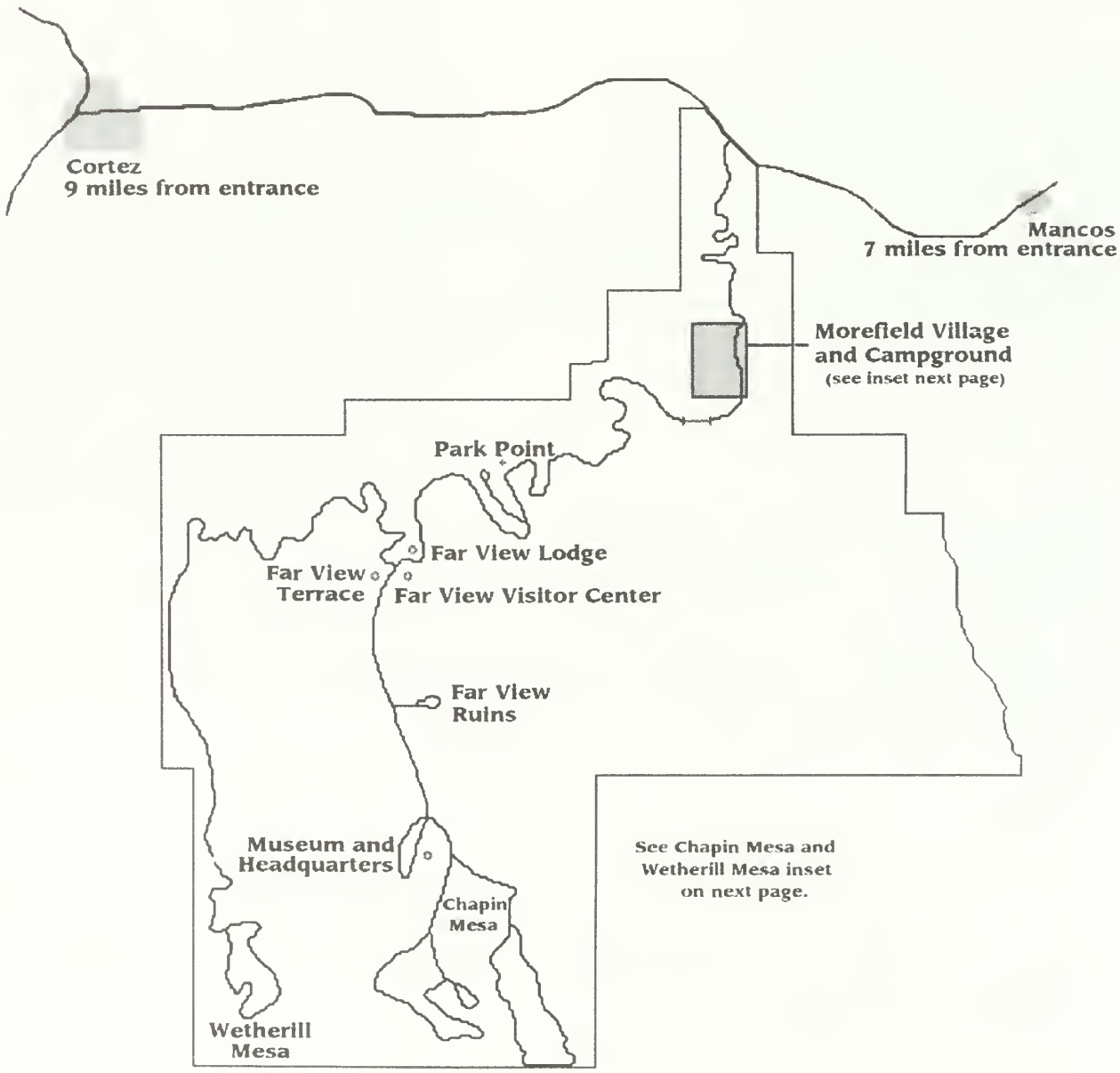
Morefield Village, located 4 miles from the park entrance, offers coin operated showers and a coin operated laundry. Both of these facilities are maintained by the concessionaire ARAMARK. These facilities are open only during summer months.

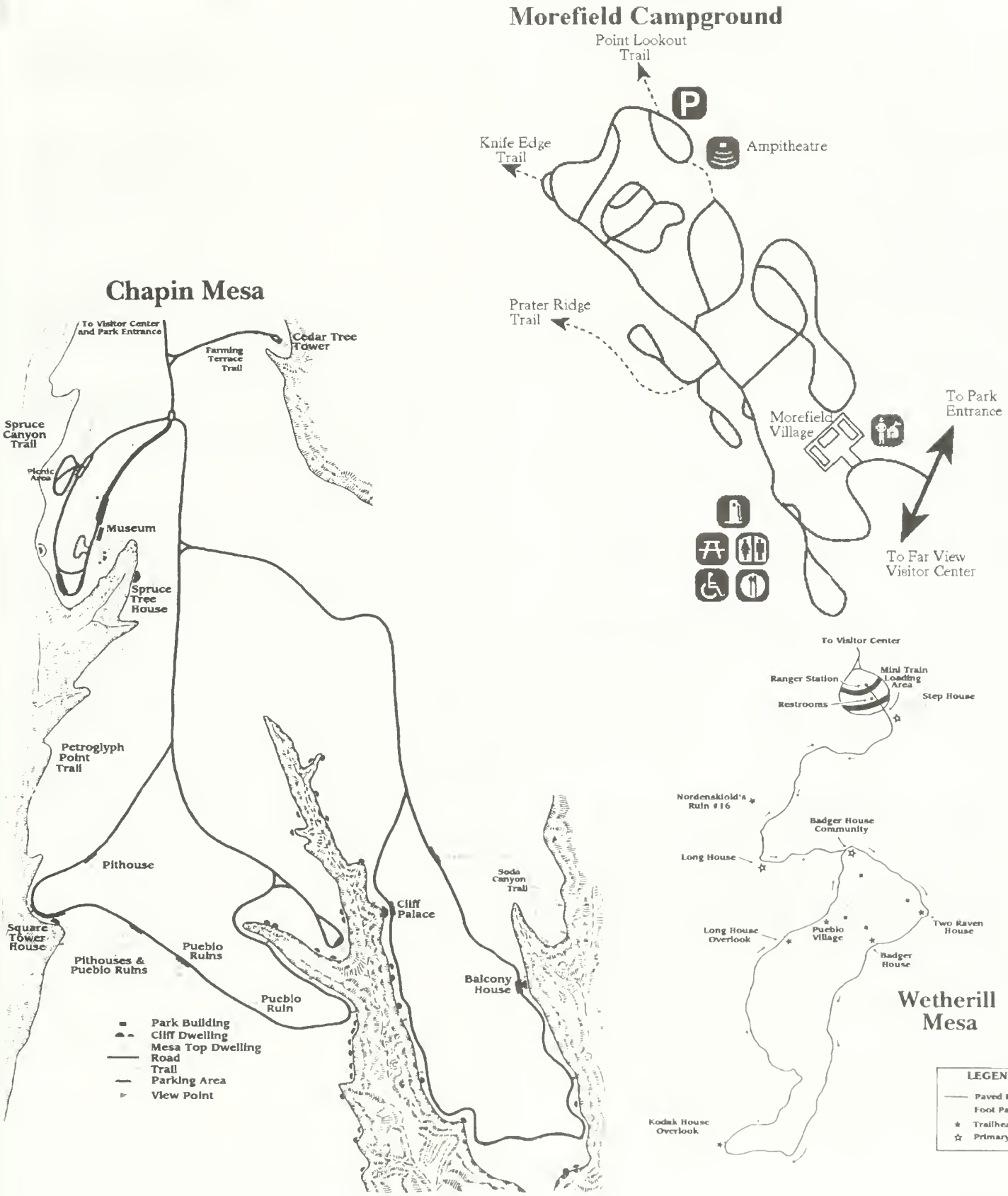
Mesa Verde Research Library

The Mesa Verde Research Library contains thousands of books and articles pertaining to Mesa Verde and the culture of those who came before. For more information, or to obtain books on loan, call (970) 529-4472.

Mesa Verde Recycles

Mesa Verde National Park is taking an active role in reducing the amount of trash that is to be accumulated in local landfills. Please do your part to help by recycling your aluminum cans. Containers are located throughout the park for your convenience.


Cortez
9 miles from entrance
Mancos
7 miles from entrance
Morefield Village
and Campground
(see inset next page)
Park Point
Far View Lodge
Far View
Terrace
Far View Visitor Center
Far View
Ruins
Museum and
Headquarters
Chapin
Mesa
Wetherill
Mesa
See Chapin Mesa and
Wetherill Mesa inset
on next page.


Morefield Campground
Point Lookout Trail
Knife Edge Trail
Ampitheatre
Prater Ridge Trail
Morefield Village
To Park Entrance
To Far View Visitor Center
Chapin Mesa
To Visitor Center and Park Entrance
Farming Terrace Trail
Cedar Tree Tower
Spruce Canyon Trail
Picnic Area
Museum
Spruce Tree House
Petroglyph Point Trail
Pithouse
Square Tower House
Pithouses & Pueblo Ruins
Pueblo Ruins
Pueblo Ruin
Soda Canyon Trail
Cliff Palace
Balcony House
Park Building
Cliff Dwelling
Mesa Top Dwelling
Road
Trail
Parking Area
View Point
To Visitor Center
Ranger Station
Mini Train Loading Area
Restrooms
Step House
Nordenskiold's Ruin #16
Badger House Community
Long House
Long House Overlook
Pueblo Village
Two Raven House
Badger House
Kodak House Overlook
Wetherill Mesa
LEGEND
Paved Road
Foot Path
Trailhead
Primary Trail

BRIEF HISTORY OF MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

1765: Don Juan Maria de Rivera, under orders from Tomas Velez Cachupin, then governor of New Mexico, led what was possibly the first expedition of white men northwest from New Mexico. Rivera set out from Santa Fe to the San Juan River, crossed the southern spur of the La Plata Mountains, then traveled down the Dolores River, crossed eastward over the Uncompahgre Plateau and then down the Uncompahgre River to the Gunnison River.

1859: Professor J. S. Newberry, in his geological report of an expedition under the leadership of Captain J. N. Macomb to explore certain territory in what is now the State of Utah, makes the first known mention of Mesa Verde. It seems quite evident from his description that Newberry must have climbed to one of the highest points of Mesa Verde, possibly Park Point, and the manner in which he uses the name Mesa Verde suggests that the name was in common usage. Newberry must not have explored any of Mesa Verde because he makes no mention of cliff dwellings.

1874: The first cliff dwelling in the Mesa Verde area known to have been entered by white men, was Two-Story Cliff House in Ute Mountain Tribal Park, discovered by W. H. Jackson in September. Jackson was the photographer for the U. S. Geological and Geographical Survey. He had heard of ruins in Mesa Verde from miners and prospectors, and it was one of these prospectors, John Moss, who led Jackson into Mancos Canyon where the cliff dwelling was discovered. Jackson found other small cliff dwellings in the canyon, but Two-Story Cliff House was the only one he named.

1875: The second cliff dwelling in Mesa Verde area to be named was Sixteen Window House. It was discovered by W. H. Holmes, leader of another government survey party that passed through Mancos Canyon.

1884: Balcony House was entered by a prospector, S. E. Osborn, some time during the spring. His name and the date March 20, 1884, have been found in a dwelling in lower Soda Canyon.

1886: The first known suggestion that the area be set aside as a National Park appeared in an editorial in the Denver Tribune Republican, December 12, 1886.

1888: On December 18, Richard Wetherill and his brother-in-law, Charles Mason, rode out on what is now Sun Point in search of lost cattle and first saw Cliff Palace. That afternoon, Richard discovered Spruce Tree House, and the next day, the two men discovered Square Tower House. Al Wetherill, Richard's brother, saw Cliff Palace sometime the year before, but he did not enter the dwelling, so the credit for discovering the dwelling has been given to Richard Wetherill and Charles Mason.

1889: Four of the Wetherill brothers returned to Mesa Verde in this year to explore and dig in the ruins. In a 15 month period, they claimed to have entered 182 cliff dwellings, 106 in Navajo Canyon alone.

1890: In the January 1, 1890 issue of the Durango Herald, there is an article on Montezuma County, expressing the idea of setting aside the Mancos Canyon areas with its cliff dwellings as a National Park.

Between 1887 and 1892 the Wetherills made several trips into Mesa Verde primarily for collecting archeological material. There were at least eight individual collections assembled by the Wetherills during this period, several of which were later combined and sold separately as four great collections.

1891: Baron Gustaf E. A. Nordenskiold, of the Academy of Sciences, Sweden, visited Mesa Verde in 1891. He is credited as being the first scientist to visit any of the cliff dwellings. He made a collection of about 600 items which were sent to Sweden and which are now in the National Museum in Helsinki, Finland.

1901: The first bill introduced before Congress to create a National Park in the Mesa Verde was introduced February 22. The bill provided for the creation of the "Colorado Cliff Dwellings National Park". It never returned from the Public Lands Committee.

1901 to 1903: Two bills were introduced during the 57th Congress in the House of Representatives for the creation of the park. Both bills died in committee. Congressional authority was secured, however, authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate for the relinquishment of the Mesa Verde tract by the Utes and an appropriation for the survey of the area.

1903 to 1905: Two more bills were introduced in the 58th Congress for the Creation of the "Colorado Cliff Dwellings National Park". One of the bills (the Hogg bill) was reported back from committee with several amendments but did not receive any further action.

1906: The first bill for the creation of "Mesa Verde National Park" was introduced in the 59th Congress in 1905. This bill was subsequently passed on and Mesa Verde National Park was created June 29, 1906. It was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Another bill passed by the 59th Congress was "an Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities", commonly referred to as the Antiquities Act of June 8, 1906. This Act made it a Federal crime to collect or destroy any historic or prehistoric object or building on Federally owned land.

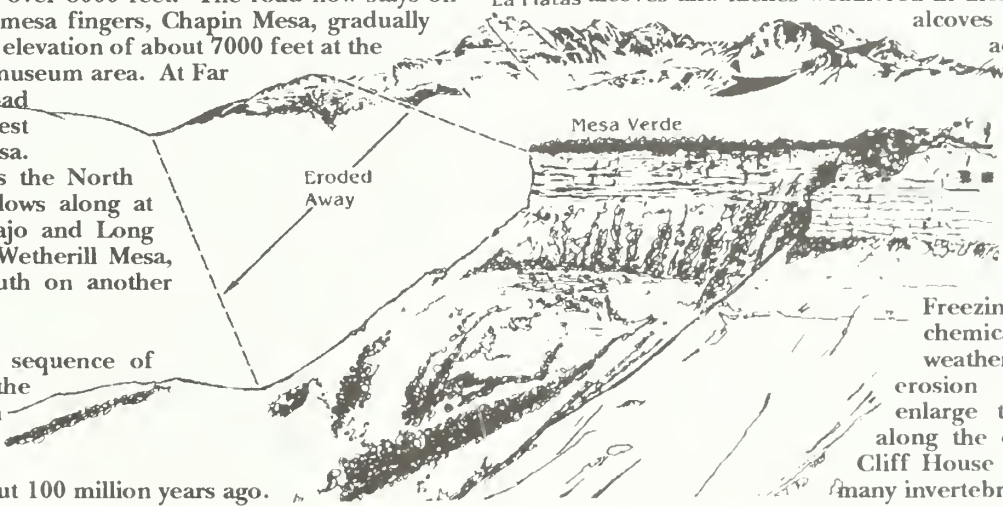
1908 to 1950: Two years after the establishment of the park, excavation and repair of the major ruins was begun so that visitors could see and enjoy the park. Most of the early work was done by Jesse Walter Fewkes, archeologist, Smithsonian Institution.

1959 to 1972: Wetherill Mesa Archeological Project - Excavation of three cliff dwellings (Long House, Mug House, and Step House) and a survey of Wetherill Mesa and excavation of selected mesa-top sites.

Geology of Mesa Verde National Park

The north face of the mesa rises abruptly nearly 2,000 feet above the flat plain between Cortez and Mancos, Colorado. The top of the mesa then slopes gently southward from about 8400 feet elevation at Point Lookout to 6800 feet on Chapin mesa near the south edge of the Park, a slope of approximately 150 feet per mile. Mesa Verde is cut by the deep, steep walled canyons into long slender north-south trending mesa fingers.

The entrance to the Park is from U.S. Highway 160 across the low flat plain, then the road climbs the north face of the mesa, and gains about 800 feet in some three miles of switchbacks along the north face. The campground is located at the head of Morefield Canyon in a broad flat area. The main road crosses Morefield Canyon, goes through a tunnel and comes out into Prater Canyon, another of the north-south drainages of the mesa. The road follows along the west side of the canyon, climbing gently until it crosses to the north face of the mesa again at the head of Moccasin Canyon. For about the next four miles, the road contours along the north face then winds around the head of Little Soda Canyon and to Far View at the top of the mesa at an elevation of a little over 8000 feet. The road now stays on top of one of the mesa fingers, Chapin Mesa, gradually sloping down to an elevation of about 7000 feet at the headquarters and museum area. At Far View, another road leads off to the west to Wetherill Mesa. This road parallels the North Rim also, and follows along at the heads of Navajo and Long Canyons to reach Wetherill Mesa, then continues south on another mesa finger.



The well exposed sequence of rocks that form the mesas originated in a great inland sea that began to cover the area about 100 million years ago. As the water encroached over the old, low, relatively flat erosion surface, streams from the west brought sands and muds into the shallow water. These sands are now the brown Dakota sandstones seen in the flat Cortez valley. The sea continued to advance, and the Mesa Verde region was well out from the shoreline which was probably close to the western edge of Utah, some 200 miles away. The sediments being deposited change from the coarser, near shore, sandy deposits to fine, evenly bedded dark shales. In all, about 2000 feet of this Mancos Shale Formation were deposited in quiet offshore conditions, and is now exposed in the steep, gray shale slopes of the north escarpment. Although the Mancos is a great shale mass, it is not one homogeneous unit. The sediments were deposited over a ten million year period, and varying environments are well documented in varied textures and bedding and an abundant and varied fossil record.

The sea reached its greatest extent and then began a slow regression. More and more sand was brought into the area as the water became shallower and the shales became progressively sandier. The massive shallow water Point Lookout Sandstone overlying the grading into the Mancos Formation caps was named for the prominent Point Lookout overlooking the flat plain. Few fossils remain because these sediments were deposited in a zone of vigorous wave and current action. The sea continued to withdraw to the northeast, and a broad, almost flat coastal plain, which had been the sea bottom, emerged. Woody shales and coals and coarse irregular sands were deposited in broad shallow swamps and along stream and inter-stream areas and became the sediments of the Menefee Formation. Many plant fossils are evidence of lush vegetation and show that the climate was wet and warm during this period when the land was only slightly above the sea.

The sea again slowly lapped father south and near shore beach and shallow water sands were deposited, now forming the Cliff House Formation. This formation takes its name from the presence of the famous cliff dwellings in the alcoves and niches weathered in these sandstones. The alcoves are formed by the action of ground water percolating through the porous sandstones until it reaches an impervious layer and then moves along this water barrier to the canyon edge. Freezing and thawing, chemical and mechanical weathering, and wind erosion all continue to enlarge the niches formed along the canyon walls. The Cliff House Formation contains many invertebrate fossils including cephalopods, clams, snails, and tracks, trails, and burrows of crustations. In addition, fragments of many fish, amphibians and reptiles have been found. Most of the vertebrate remains are broken due to wave action at the time of deposition. The fossils near the top of the formation have been dated at approximately 78.5 million years old. The sea continued to advance and more sediments were deposited which have since been eroded away from the Mesa Verde, but are known from other areas. Withdrawal of the sea began and shallow water sediments were left. These too have been eroded from the mesa. Uplift of the area at the end of the Cretaceous Period drained the seaway and initiated a long period of erosion which gave rise to the present topography. Igneous intrusions during the early part of this period gave rise to the La Plata Mountains to the North and Ute Mountain to the west. Much of the flat mesa surface and the Cortez valley are covered with varying depths of red soil (loess), a wind blown deposit from the southwest which has been accumulating for the past one million years.

COMMON PLANTS AND ANIMALS OF THE MESA VERDE

Mesa Verde is in the Upper Sonoran Life Zone. This zone is characterized by semi-arid climate, moderately high altitude, and pinyon-juniper forests. The plants and animals listed below are typical of this region.

COMMON TREES AND SHRUBS

Cliff fendlerbush *Fendlera rupicola*
Douglas fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii*
Gambel oak *Quercus gambelii*
Mormon tea *Ephedra viridis*
Mountain mahogany *Cerocarpus montanus*
Pinyon pine *Pinus edulis*
Ponderosa pine *Pinus ponderosa*
Rabbitbrush *Chrysothamnus nauscosus*
Utah juniper *Juniperus utahensis*
Utah serviceberry *Amelanchier utahensis*
Yucca *Yucca baccata*
Big sagebrush *Artemesia tridentata*
Skunkbush sumac *Rhus trilobata*
Snowberry *Symphoricarpos oreophilus*

COMMON FLOWERS

Aster *Aster bigelovii*
Evening primrose *Oenothers caespitosa*
Globemallow *Sphaeralcea coccinea*
Indian paintbrush *Castilleja linariaefolia*
Larkspur *Delphinium nelsonii*
Lupine *Lupinus sericeus*
Mariposa lily *Calochortus nuttallii*
Pricklypear cactus *Opuntia polycantha*
Scarlet gilia *Gilia aggregata*
Scarlet penstemon *Penstamon bridgesii*

COMMON REPTILES

Prarie rattlesnake *Crotalus viridis viridis*
Bullsnake *Pituophis melanoleucus sayi*
Yellow-bellied racer *Coluber constrictor mormon*
Collared lizard *Crotaphytus collaris*
Northern plateau lizard *Sceloporus undalatus elongatus*
Sagebrush lizard *Sceloporus graciosus*
Short-horned lizard *Phrynosoma douglassi herandesi*

COMMON MAMMALS

Masked shrew *Sorex cinereus*
Merriam shrew *S. Merriami*
California myotis *Myotis Californicus*
Long eared Myotis *M. evotis*
Fringed myotis *M. thysanodes*
Yuma myotis *M. yumanensis*
Hoary bat *Lasiurus cinereus*
Western pipistrel *Pipistrellus hesperus*
Spotted Bat *Euderma Maculatum*
Desert cottontail *Sylvilagus audubonii*
Mountain cottontail *S. nuttallii*
Blacktail jackrabbit *Lepus californicus*
Colorado chipmunk *E. quadrivittatus*
Yellowbelly marmot *Marmota flaviventris*
Golden Mantled Squirrel *Eutamias quadrivittatus*
Tassel-eared squirrel (Abert squirrel) *Sciurus aberti*
Rock squirrel *Citellus variegatus*
Whitetail prarie dog *Cynomys gunnisoni*
Valley pocket gopher *Thomomys bottae*
Plains pocket mouse *Perognathus flavescens*
Beaver *Castor canadensis*
Western harvest mouse *Reithrodontomys megalotis*
Deer mouse *P. maniculatus*
Whitethroat woodrat *Neotoma albigula*
Mexican woodrat *N. mexicanus*
Mexican vole *M. mexicanus*
Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus*
Porcupine *Erethizon dorsatum*
Coyote *Canis Latrans*
Red fox *Vulpes vulpes*
Black bear *Ursus americanus*
Ringtail cat *Bassariscus astutus*
Raccoon *Procyon lotor*
Longtail weasel *Mustela frenata*
Badger *Taxidea taxus*
Striped Skunk *Mephitis mephitis*
Mountian lion *Felis concolor*
Mule deer *Odocoileus hemionus*

COMMON BIRDS

Black-billed magpie *Pica pica*
Canyon wren *Catherpes mexicanus*
Common bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus*
Common raven *Corvus corax*
Mountain chickadee *Parus gambeli*
Pinyon jay *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*
Plain titmouse *Parus inornatus*
Red-tailed hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*
Scrub jay *Aphelocoma coerulescens*
Steller's jay *Cyanocitta stelleri*
Turkey vulture *Cathartes aura*
White-breasted nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*
White-throated swift *Aeronautes saxatalis*
Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
Sharp-shinned hawk *Accipiter striatus*
American kestrel *Falco sparverius*
Mourning dove *Zenaida macroura*
Great horned owl *Bubo virdinianus*
Common poor will *Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*
Broad tailed hummingbird *Selasphorus platycercus*
Northern flicker *Colaptes auratus*
Hairy woodpecker *Picoides villosus*
Ash-throated flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens*
Violet-green swallow *Tachycineta thalassina*
House wren *Troglodytes acdon*
Blue-gray gnat catcher *Polioptila caerulea*
Mountain bluebird *Sialia cuttucoides*
Townsend's solitaire *Myadested townsendi*
American robin *Turdus Migratorius*
Solitary vireo *Vireo solitarius*
Yellow-rumped warbler *Dendroica coronata*
Black-throated gray warbler *Dendroica nigescens*
Black-headed grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus*
Rufous-sided towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*
Chipping sparrow *Spizella passerina*
Gray-headed junco *Junco hyemalis*
Brewer's blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*
Western tanager *Piranga ludourciana*
Pine siskin *Carduelis pinus*
Rosy finch *Leucosticts arctoa*

Hovenweep National Monument

Hovenweep National Monument, established on March 2, 1923, consists of six groups of ruins located on a total of 784 acres. These prehistoric sites represent the cultural climax of Pueblo farming villages approximately 700 years ago.

The monument includes a ranger contact station and short hiking trails, all of which are located at the Square Tower group. The ranger contact station is accessible to the handicapped, however, the trails are not. Pets must be on a leash or under physical control at all times. Firearms are not allowed in the monument; when transported they must be broken down.

Access to the Monument includes graded dirt, gravel and paved roads. Dirt roads become muddy and sometimes impassable during and after storms. Inquire locally about current conditions.

The RANGER CONTACT STATION, open daily 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, provides interpretive services and trail information to orient visitors to the area. A restroom and bottled drinking water are available. In addition, specialty books and some convenience items are sold here. The station may be closed when the ranger is on patrol. There is no entrance fee.

The SQUARE TOWER SELF-GUIDING TRAIL consists of two loops, totaling two miles. This primitive trail, which takes approximately two hours to walk, is marked with rock cairns. A trail guide can be purchased or borrowed at the ranger station.

The climate in this high desert environment is dry, with an average 12 inches of precipitation per year. Temperatures range from average winter lows of -10 to 0 degrees, to average summer highs of 100 to 105 degrees. Spring and fall generally have mild temperatures. **PLEASE REMEMBER TO CARRY PLENTY OF WATER WHEN HIKING.**

Wildlife includes: Mammals - deer, coyote, fox, rabbits, rodents and bats; Reptiles - snakes and lizards; Birds - ravens, hawks, and a variety of small species. During the late spring and early summer gnats are plentiful.

Gasoline, supplies, meals, lodging, and a telephone are not available. The nearest gasoline and supplies are located at the Ismay Trading Post (14 miles), Hatch Trading Post (16 miles), or Aneth (20 miles). The nearest meals or lodging are located in Cortez (43 miles), Bluff (40 miles), or Blanding (45 miles).

For more information about the monument, contact:

Superintendent
Hovenweep National Monument
McElmo Route
Cortez, Colorado 81321
(970) 529-4461
or (970) 749-0510

Mileages to Other Places of Interest

Alamosa, CO	187
Albuquerque, NM	247
Arches NP, UT	129
Black Canyon of the Gunnison NM, CO	159
Blanding, UT	91
Boulder, CO	399
Bryce Canyon NP, UT	381
Canyon de Chelly NM, NM	152
Canyonlands NP, UT	
The Needles	120
Island in the Sky	157
Capital Reef, UT (via Green River)	265
Carlsbad Caverns NP, NM	570
Chaco Canyon NM, NM	141
Colorado NM, CO (via Durango)	220
Colorado Springs, CO	351
Denver, CO (via Walsenburg)	399
(via Wolf Creek, Fairplay)	371
Estes Park, CO	475
Farmington, NM (via Hesperus)	71
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Flagstaff, AZ	275
Four Corners NM	46
Gallup, NM	142
Glen Canyon Dam , Page, AZ	228
Glenwood Springs, CO (via Grand Jct)	323
(via Paonia)	266
Grand Canyon NP, AZ (South Rim)	
(via Gallup, Flagstaff)	407
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(North Rim)	392
Grand Junction, CO	210
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(via Aneth)	150
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Rocky Mt NP, CO (W. Entrance)	426
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Royal Gorge, UT	304
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Santa Fe, NM	249
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Tucson, AZ	505
Walnut Canyon NM, AZ	279
Wupatki NM, AZ	249
Zion NP, CO (via Page)	349

Mesa Verde National Park
Planning Guide

Clemson University
3 1604 011 582 022

Planning Your Adventure

From the entrance station near U.S. Highway 160, it is 21 miles to the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, Headquarters area, and Spruce Tree House cliff dwelling. You will be driving a steep, narrow, winding mountain road. Allow at least forty five minutes for driving time depending on weather and traffic conditions. It is a very scenic trip with spectacular views into four states. Watch for rocks that may be on the road.

½ Day or Less

Visitors should plan to spend at least three hours at Mesa Verde. Two Hours of this time will be driving time into and out of the park. Your first stop should be at the Far View Visitor Center, located 15 miles from the park entrance, to get information and orientation. From there we suggest you visit the Chapin Mesa Museum and Spruce Tree House cliff dwelling. Another option if you have just a few hours would be to drive the Ruins Road loop.

One Day

Stop first at the Far View Visitor Center for park information and to orient yourself. Purchase tickets for the Cliff Palace, Balcony House or Long House tour if you wish to see those sites. Visit the Chapin Mesa Museum and Spruce Tree House. Drive the Ruins Road to learn the chronological story of Mesa Verde. Plan to take either the Cliff Palace or Balcony House tour and allow the time to stop at the overlooks on this loop of Ruins Road. As you leave Chapin Mesa, stop at Cedar Tree Tower and perhaps the ½ mile hike on the Farming Terrace Trail further up the road. Enjoy visiting and learning about Far View Ruins, a site inhabited for about three centuries.

Mesa Verde National Park
P.O. Box 8
Mesa Verde N. P., Colorado 81330

The information you requested is enclosed!

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